

**BIRDING EXTREMADURA AND CASA RURAL EL RECUERDO**

**CHRISTMAS HOLIDAY FOR JULIE AND GEOFF**

**23<sup>rd</sup> December – 29<sup>th</sup> December 2021**

**Itinerary**

**23<sup>rd</sup> December 2021: Collection at Madrid**

**24<sup>th</sup> December 2021: Sierra Brava Reservoir, rice fields and *dehesa* of Casas del Hitos, River Ruercas, rice fields of Palazuelo and Campo Lugar plains.**

**25<sup>th</sup> December 2021: Free day**

**26<sup>th</sup> December 2021: Rice fields at Puebla de Alcollarín**

**27<sup>th</sup> December 2021: Plains east of Cáceres, Santa Marta de Magasca and plains north of Trujillo**

**28<sup>th</sup> December 2021: Alcollarín Reservoir**

**29<sup>th</sup> December 2021: Arrocampo Reservoir and return to Madrid**



*Geoff at Alcollarín*

**23<sup>rd</sup> December 2021: Collection at Madrid**

Geoff and Julie arrived early evening at Madrid and in pretty grotty weather we made our way around the Madrid ring road to join the A5 motorway. We can an excellent evening meal at the Las Esparteras bar and then continued in our journey. Although the traffic was quite heavy, and at a couple of places there were traffic jams on account of broken-down vehicles, we

made excellent progress. Claudia was there to welcome us at Casa Rural El Recuerdo when we arrived.

**24th December 2021: Sierra Brava Reservoir, rice fields and *dehesa* of Casas del Hitos, River Ruercas, rice fields of Palazuelo and Campo Lugar plains.**

Dawn broke to drizzle and heavily overcast conditions. Despite this a **Song Thrush** sang from the almond tree in front of the house and a **Hawfinch** was calling. As we headed off, taking the road over the Sierra de los Lagares pass, thick hill mist made visibility very poor. Fortunately, as we descended towards the rice fields, we left the mist behind. For the first hour or so, belts of drizzle turned everything grey, but little by little, the day brightened, and we had sunshine in the afternoon.

At our first stop at the Sierra Brava reservoir, we found an **Eagle Owl** sitting on a grassy bank, looking rather damp and we wondered even if it was using the opportunity of the wet grass to bathe. A band of **Crag Martins** with a couple of **Barn Swallows** were hawking insects. Out on the reservoir, there were several rafts of **Common Shelduck**, as well as more distant waterfowl: mainly **Mallard**, **Shoveler**, **Pintail** and **Wigeon**. The sound of **Common Cranes** provided a backdrop from our first stop and then right through the day.

From there we entered the rice fields, stopping first to scan for geese, finding some distant **Grey Lag Geese** and amongst them an immature **Greater White-fronted Goose**. Cranes were feeding on the stubble fields, whilst dense flocks of **Spanish Sparrows** rose when flushed by **Marsh Harriers**. We then found large numbers of **Grey Lag Geese** close to the road and with great care to avoid disturbing them, we watched them from the vehicle. Together with them, we were delighted to find a **Tundra Bean Goose**, a rarity here. We were able to have superb and prolonged views of it.



*Tundra Bean Goose with Grey Lags*

As we left the area in search for coffee, we were happily delayed by brilliant views of a pair of **Black-winged Kites**, followed just a couple of minutes later by two more. We were thwarted by our coffee search however, since the bar was packed to the rafters by a festive party. So, we decided to stop for our picnic (it was already 3pm!) beside the River Ruercas. As we ate, we could hear a pair of **Eagle Owls** calling to each other. Numerous **Common Chiffchaffs** foraging at the water's edge were a delight to watch. A **Water Rail** made an appearance as did a **Kingfisher**, whilst a **Great** and **Little Egrets** waited together.



*Common Chiffchaff*

On the rice fields, there were hundreds of **Common Cranes**, many in family groups. Bunches of **Black-winged Stilts** huddled together. There were **Glossy Ibis**, **Greenshank** and **Spotted Redshank**. A **Common Curlew** probed its way along a muddy bank.

From there we eventually enjoyed a coffee stop in the village of Campo Lugar (third time lucky, since our second choice was closed). We then had a wonderful drive back across the plains with the late afternoon sun behind us. A pair of **Black-winged Kites** foraged at the start of the road. On our way we saw **Great Bustard**, **Ravens**, **Marsh Harriers**, a **Peregrine** and flocks of **Corn Buntings** and **Calandra Larks**.

#### **26<sup>th</sup> December 2021: Rice fields at Puebla de Alcollarín**

Misty, drizzly weather pretty much all day, but that did not dishearten us. The plan for the rice field birding was a good fit: wetland birds don't mind the rain, and we could watch them from or close to the car. We started off spending an hour or so beside rough pasture, kept busy by the great number and diversity of small birds. Large flocks of **Spanish** and **Tree Sparrows**, a

**Bluethroat** in a ditch, accompanied by **Cetti's Warbler** and **Robin**. Large flocks of **Common Cranes** moving through the mist. Parties of **Ravens** seemingly chuckling at us. A **Sparrowhawk** put up throngs of small birds, as well as flocks of **Lapwing**.

We pulled ourselves away for an excellent coffee and then returned to the rice fields proper and spent the rest of the day surrounded by **Common Cranes** and finding groups of waders. These included large numbers of **Little Stint**, parties of **Kentish Plover**, **Spotted Redshank** and a **Wood Sandpiper**. **Water Pipits** were in good numbers. We had superb views of **Bluethroat**, especially in the later afternoon when they were venturing further out of cover to forage.



*Common Cranes*

Two **Grey Plover** were an unusual find for mid-winter here and at the same time perhaps two thousand **Black-headed Gulls** were foraging in a frenzy amongst rows of olive trees – what were they doing?

As we left the area, in the falling light a dozen or more **Marsh Harriers** appeared, flying in to stand on the stubble, whilst two male **Hen Harriers**, quartered the stubble in the distance.

### **27<sup>th</sup> December 2021: Plains east of Cáceres, Santa Marta de Magasca and plains north of Trujillo**

A change in the weather with fresh winds and generally sunny right through the day, which proved excellent for a change in habitat too – so we devoted the day to the plains between Trujillo and Cáceres.

Stopping first just east of Cáceres, we found a small flock of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** and a rather larger flock of **Great Bustards**. The latter consisted of about 35 birds, seen rather

distantly. A **Merlin** sped through, and a female **Hen Harrier** appeared briefly. We were happily surrounded by numerous **Calandra Larks**, **Lapwings** and **Golden Plovers**, as well as enjoying some excellent views of **Iberian Grey Shrike**.

After a coffee in the friendly little village of Santa Marta de Magacsa, we stopped to look down into the valley of the River Tamuja. This was a brilliant vantage point for birds of prey and with excellent weather conditions, we were not disappointed. Star was an adult **Golden Eagle** which appeared to the east and the reappeared just west of us, coming in at close range twice. A **Spanish Imperial Eagle** was more distant, but we also had several **Red Kites**, as well as both species of **vulture**. The viewpoint also proved very productive for **Otter**, with a prolonged and enjoyable view of one fishing below us.



*Golden Eagle*

At the river north of the village, a brief stop yielded a female **Sparrowhawk**. We then returned to the plains, taking the road back to Trujillo. We made one stop, spending nearly two hours watching a flock of 20 **Little Bustards** feeding, preening and interacting close to us. There was also a large flock of over a hundred Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, further away but in magnificent light.

Throngs of small birds: **Calandra Larks**, **Skylarks**, **Corn Buntings** and **Meadow Pipits**, were the reason why the area was also so attractive to birds of prey. A male **Hen Harrier** and a female **Merlin** were testament to this. The **Merlin** treated us to several views perched on stones. We saw yet another **Golden Eagle**, soaring majestically to the south of us.

## 28<sup>th</sup> December 2021: Alcollarín Reservoir

It was a much clearer start to the day, with the hill to the south of the house being visible for the first time since the start of the holiday. It remained dry (part from a little midday drizzle) all day and felt increasingly milder. Indeed during the day we saw no fewer than six species of butterfly on the wing in weather which felt positively spring-like.

We spent the whole day (apart from the mandatory coffee-break) at the Alcollarín Reservoir. This offered us plenty of time to savour the vast numbers of wintering waterfowl (over 7000 **Shoveler**), thousands of **Teal** and about 30 **Black-necked Grebes**. There were also excellent views of feeding **Spoonbills** and **Black Storks**.

On marshland we found two overwintering **Quail** and three **Jack Snipe**, as well as a constant presence of **Zitting Cisticolas**. Raptors included a fine male **Hen Harrier**. The holm oak woodland held numerous small birds including **Firecrest**.

Overall we saw nearly 80 species of birds at this single site, but most memorable was simply watching such a huge numbers of brds, in such a peaceful and gorgeous setting, with the sun breaking through the cloud, catching the yellow of the tall rocket in flower and lighting up the mountains forming the backdrop to our view. And we hardly saw a soul all day.



*Julie at Alcollarín*

## 29<sup>th</sup> December 2021: Arrocampo Reservoir and return to Madrid

As we left Casa Rural El Recuerdo, with bands of mist and patches of sunshine, a **Woodlark** was singing – such a beautiful song!

There were banks of fog on the way but when we arrived at Arrocampo (with a **Black-winged Kite** surveying us from the roadside cable) although overcast, there was no wind, and the conditions were excellent for birding beside the marsh. We walked from the first hide to the

second. At our first stop beside the marsh there were good views of **Purple Swamphen** and two **Black-crowned Night Herons** were found roosting in a tree. A **Black-winged Kite** hovered at the back of the marsh. The marsh was full of **Chiffchaffs** catching midges close to the water's edge. In an orchard along the walk, we found a mixed finch flock, dominated by **Greenfinches**, but also with **Chaffinches**, **Tree** and **Spanish Sparrows** and a rather gorgeous male **Brambling**. An **Iberian Grey Shrike** sang from the top of a tree. At the second hide, again we were rewarded by several **Purple Swamphen**. A **Spoonbill** glided in to land close by. We were also thrilled to watch a **Great Bittern** flying to land at the back of the marsh.

On our return, we had amazing views of a group of five **Penduline Tits** and, from the same spot, a very obliging male **Bluethroat**.

After coffee, whilst we watched a small flock of **Barn Swallows**, we headed to the back of the village for our picnic. A flock of **Glossy Ibis** flew to the east. The highlight was a stern looking **Little Owl** on a dead tree beside the road, ably spotted by Julie.

We then started our onward journey to Madrid, arriving safely and in good time just after four.

#### LIST OF SPECIES SEEN

1. **Grey Lag Goose**: Large numbers on the rice fields.
2. **Greater White-fronted Goose**: One with Grey Lags at Casas del Hitos.
3. **Tundra Bean Goose**: One with Grey Lags at Casas del Hitos.
4. **Egyptian Goose**: Seen at all reservoirs.
5. **Common Shelduck**: Seen at Sierra Brava and Alcollarín Reservoirs.
6. **Wigeon**: Seen at Sierra Brava and Alcollarín Reservoirs.
7. **Gadwall**: Seen on pool on plains and at Alcollarín.
8. **Teal**: Seen on pool on plains and at Alcollarín.
9. **Pintail**: Seen at Sierra Brava and Alcollarín Reservoirs.
10. **Mallard**: Seen most days.
11. **Shoveler**: Seen at all reservoirs.
12. **Pochard**: Seen at Alcollarín.
13. **Red-legged Partridge**: Seen on two days.
14. **Quail**: Two at Alcollarín.
15. **Little Grebe**: Seen at all reservoirs.
16. **Great Crested Grebe**: Seen at all reservoirs.
17. **Black-necked Grebe**: Over 30 at Alcollarín.
18. **Great Cormorant**: Seen almost daily.
19. **Great Bittern**: One at Arrocampo.
20. **Little Bittern**: Several heard at Arrocampo.
21. **Cattle Egret**: Seen on three days, large numbers on the rice fields.
22. **Little Egret**: Seen most days.
23. **Great White Egret**: Seen most days.
24. **Grey Heron**: Seen daily.
25. **Black Stork**: Four seen at Alcollarín.
26. **White Stork**: Seen daily.
27. **Spoonbill**: Seen at Alcollarín and Arrocampo.
28. **Griffon Vulture**: Seen most days.
29. **Black Vulture**: Seen on two days.

30. **Spanish Imperial Eagle:** One seen at Río Tamuja.
31. **Golden Eagle:** Two seen on 27<sup>th</sup> December on the plains.
32. **Red Kite:** Seen daily.
33. **Marsh Harrier:** Seen daily.
34. **Hen Harrier:** Seen on three days.
35. **Common Buzzard:** Seen daily.
36. **Sparrowhawk:** Seen almost every day.
37. **Black-winged Kite:** Six seen on 24<sup>th</sup> December and two seen at Arrocampo.
38. **Common Kestrel:** Seen daily.
39. **Merlin:** Seen on two days.
40. **Peregrine Falcon:** One at Campo Lugar on 24<sup>th</sup> December.
41. **Water Rail:** Seen or heard on three days.
42. **Moorhen:** Seen on three days.
43. **Purple Swamphen:** Seen at Arrocampo.
44. **Common Coot:** Seen at Alcollarín and Arrocampo.
45. **Common Crane:** Thousands seen on rice fields.
46. **Little Bustard:** Seen on plains north of Trujillo.
47. **Great Bustard:** Seen on Campo Lugar plains and also east of Cáceres.
48. **Black-winged Stilt:** Seen almost daily.
49. **Ringed Plover:** Seen on rice fields.
50. **Kentish Plover:** Seen on rice fields and at Alcollarín.
51. **Grey Plover:** Two on rice fields.
52. **Golden Plover:** Seen on three days.
53. **Lapwing:** Seen daily.
54. **Dunlin:** Seen on rice fields.
55. **Little Stint:** Seen on rice fields.
56. **Ruff:** Seen on rice fields.
57. **Common Snipe:** Seen daily.
58. **Jack Snipe:** Three seen at Alcollarín.
59. **Common Curlew:** One at rice fields.
60. **Common Redshank:** Seen on rice fields.
61. **Wood Sandpiper:** One on rice fields on 26<sup>th</sup> December.
62. **Greenshank:** Seen almost daily.
63. **Green Sandpiper:** Seen almost daily.
64. **Common Sandpiper:** Seen at Alcollarín.
65. **Lesser Black-backed Gull:** Seen almost daily
66. **Black-headed Gull:** Seen daily.
67. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse:** Seen on plains east of Cáceres.
68. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:** Large numbers seen north of Trujillo.
69. **Feral Pigeon:** Seen daily.
70. **Wood Pigeon:** Seen on two days.
71. **Collared Dove:** Seen almost daily.
72. **Eagle Owl:** Seen at Sierra Brava.
73. **Little Owl:** Seen at Arrocampo and heard at Pago de San Clemente.
74. **Tawny Owl:** Heard at Pago de San Clemente.
75. **Kingfisher:** Seen almost daily.
76. **Hoopoe:** Seen daily.
77. **Great Spotted Woodpecker:** Heard on 24<sup>th</sup> December at River Ruercas.

78. **Calandra Lark**: Seen on plains.
79. **Crested Lark**: Seen daily.
80. **Thekla Lark**: Seen on two days.
81. **Woodlark**: Singing at Pago de Sam Clemente on 29<sup>th</sup> December.
82. **Skylark**: Seen on two days.
83. **Crag Martin**: Seen on two days.
84. **Barn Swallow**: Seen at Sierra Brava and Arrocampo.
85. **Meadow Pipit**: Seen daily.
86. **Water Pipit**: Seen on rice fields.
87. **Grey Wagtail**: Seen on three days.
88. **Yellow Wagtail**: Seen on rice fields.
89. **White Wagtail**: Seen daily.
90. **Wren**: Seen on three days.
91. **Duncock**: Recorded on two days.
92. **Robin**: Seen daily.
93. **Bluethroat**: Seen on rice fields and at Arrocampo.
94. **Black Redstart**: Seen on three days.
95. **Stonechat**: Seen daily.
96. **Blackbird**: Seen daily.
97. **Song Thrush**: Seen daily.
98. **Redwing**: Seen on two days.
99. **Mistle Thrush**: Seen at Alcollarín and Arrocampo.
100. **Cetti's Warbler**: Seen almost daily.
101. **Zitting Cisticola**: Seen most days.
102. **Dartford Warbler**: Seen on three days.
103. **Sardinian Warbler**: Seen almost daily.
104. **Blackcap**: Seen daily.
105. **Chiffchaff**: Seen daily.
106. **Firecrest**: Seen at Alcollarín.
107. **Long-tailed Tit**: Seen on two days.
108. **Blue Tit**: Seen daily.
109. **Great Tit**: Seen daily.
110. **Penduline Tit**: Seen at Arrocampo.
111. **Iberian Grey Shrike**: Seen daily.
112. **Iberian Magpie**: Seen daily.
113. **Magpie**: Seen daily.
114. **Jackdaw**: Seen almost daily.
115. **Raven**: Seen almost daily.
116. **Common Starling**: Seen on the plains.
117. **Spotless Starling**: Seen daily.
118. **House Sparrow**: Seen daily.
119. **Spanish Sparrow**: Seen daily.
120. **Tree Sparrow**: Seen on rice fields and at Arrocampo.
121. **Red Avadavat**: Seen on rice fields.
122. **Common Waxbill**: Seen on rice fields, Alcollarín and Arrocampo.
123. **Chaffinch**: Seen daily.
124. **Brambling**: One seen at Arrocampo.
125. **Serin**: Seen most days.

126. **Greenfinch:** Seen on three days, large flock at Arrocampo.
127. **Goldfinch:** Seen daily.
128. **Siskin:** Seen on 24<sup>th</sup> December.
129. **Linnet:** Seen daily.
130. **Hawfinch:** Seen at Pago de San Clemente.
131. **Rock Bunting:** Seen at Alcollarín.
132. **Reed Bunting:** Seen on rice fields.
133. **Corn Bunting:** Seen daily.

#### **Butterflies:**

Red Admiral

Clouded Yellow

Speckled Wood

Wall Brown

Small White

Western Dappled White

Small Copper

#### **Mammals**

Egyptian Mongoose

Otter

Rabbit

#### **Reptiles/Amphibians**

Spiny Toad